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The service of the loyal

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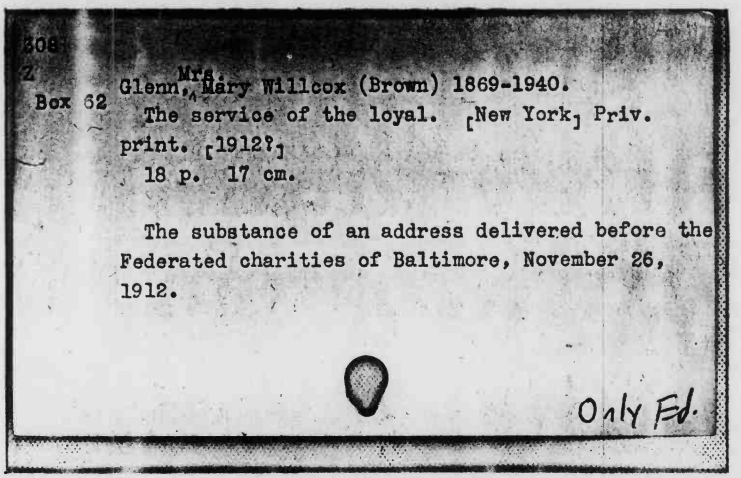
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THE SERVICE OF THE LOYAL

MARY WILLCOX GLENN

PRIVATELY PRINTED

THE SERVICE OF THE LOYAL

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This message to workers in the charity organization societies of the country is the substance of an address delivered before the Federated Charities of Baltimore, November 26, 1912. It has been printed in this form by a few who, after reading it, wished to share it with a somewhat larger audience.

THE SERVICE OF THE LOYAL

DURING the years of unceasing effort that lie behind our charity organization societies, what has been the aim of the men and women serving in their ranks? Such service—the service of the loyal—must include the labors not merely of their volunteer membership, but of all who, of their free will, have given of themselves beyond the measure that can be computed by salaries or by titles. Even though at times there may have been an obscuring of the aim, there has been always an underlying purpose, which may be expressed as being a quest, a quest for right relationship between those who have wherefrom to give and those who have but in part the wherewithal to live.

The charity organization societies have not been adventuring alone on so delicate a task. The quest for right relationship has lain at the source of the settlement movement ever since Edward

Denison, in 1867, wrote those trumpet-like letters from Philpot Street, East London, proclaiming that " no man may deliver his brother, he can but throw him a plank," and a group of Oxford thinkers urged ardent college men to go into the heart of London and see for themselves. In the background we see, too, all of those who, like St. Francis of Assisi, like Von Voght of Hamburg, Ozanam of Paris, Chalmers of Glasgow, Josephine Shaw Lowell of New York, and Octavia Hill of London, have through successive generations held fast the vision of establishing right relations between man and man through a persisting effort on the part of the one to evaluate the needs of the other—an effort which has been made throughout in behalf not of class for class, but of man for man.

In thinking of him who serves as one entrusted with an ideal, I should like first to picture him as an adventurer, and as such bringing three distinctive contributions to his chosen field of service.

UNITY OF PURPOSE

THE first contribution to be considered is unity of purpose. During these years in which small groups of volunteers have been gathering together in our societies at regular intervals to consider case by case the needs of the families under treatment, the effort has been made to bring into a local or neighborhood conference all those who, within a given area, are administering charitable assistance of any kind. The aim of the local conference has been not to effect a defined union of charitable forces, but to achieve, through gradual wearing of mind on mind, a felt unity of aim and of method. To agree to union in our field of charitable effort is, we know, a comparatively simple task; to bring about unity is a slow educational process and one that cannot be measured by efficiency tests. Now to aim for unity must lie at the root of our adventure, because, through the gradual bringing about of a common conception of the big task which we have essayed,

lies our chance of success. There cannot be right relationship until, to use Professor Bosanquet's phrase, there is the restoring or supporting of the social or citizen mind. There can be no such restoration or support through charitable intervention unless the gravity and complexity of the task be realized by an enlarging body of charitable workers. The weekly district conference meeting may seem a very dull and halting way to bring about a big result, but it is one of the means which have begun and are continuing an educational process and, thereby, it is making a distinctive contribution to the cause of unity.

DIVERSITY

OUR second contribution is diversity. If one has gone through a pile of old case records and has seen how the district tendency is to revert to a few expedients for relieving needs, one keenly feels the necessity for bringing a freshness of view to bear on each case problem. Even though the staff

worker keep a freshness of point of view and the power to make new adjustments in the treatment of individual families, she cannot fulfil her purpose unless help be given her to carry out the contemplated plans. We all know the overworked district secretary of the "troubled heart," whose care is that the "gear engages," that "the switches lock," and that "the wheels run truly." We who have watched her know, in spite of Kipling's sardonic verses, that, though her position be that of Martha, "she it is who has the faith of Mary to make accomplishment." But in order to hold her faith fresh for her Lord's service, she must have the support of those who can help her to diversify the daily efforts made in behalf of the varyingly oppressed.

ELASTICITY

OUR third contribution is elasticity. Those of us who have served on boards of managers of charitable or educational agencies know the tendency to perpetuate the thing that is, and to fall

into the habit of measuring success by a quantitative rule. To be able to break the "cake of custom" of our own charitable practices is, as we know, no light undertaking. On our district committees, for instance, is it easy to change the method of presenting cases? Are we willing to bring representatives of other societies not to hear us discuss cases, but to teach us how to consider our own cases better? Are we ready to lose the sense that the cases are our cases and to consider that there is a common pool, so to speak, of case work, into which we must each stand ready to pour our experience and from which we each must draw? Readjustment makes a heavy demand on the natural conservatism of the established group. A body of volunteers adding steadily thoughtful members to its number must provide the quality of elasticity.

DISCIPLINE

THAT the volunteer may really be ready to make this threefold contribution presupposes that, as a member of a group, he has accepted the discipline

of service. In William James's call to service, "The Moral Equivalent of War," we get the note that we need. If ours is a high adventure, a quest for right relationship, there must be a very definite preparation for usefulness and a determination to give unceasingly of ourselves. The word that fits this call for discipline is steadfastness: it includes a readiness to give time to be fitted for one's task, to stand by the task when it is assigned, and to vary the task if the demand be for variation of duties. Those of us who have worked on district committees know what it means to have even one volunteer whose steadfastness has become a recognized part of the district equipment; those who have been responsible for directing the work of district secretaries know what it has meant to a district secretary when the steadfast volunteer has been obliged to drop from the district ranks. I have in mind the impression made on me by one of the Baltimore district workers, from whom was withdrawn a volunteer who had worked with her to steady family

life. She was like a dove with a broken wing. Elasticity, ability to diversify her work and to unite her local group, seemed to have left her; no power remained other than to keep close to the ground in a dull routine. The staff worker who has had the lift of the steadfast volunteer knows that she cannot fulfil her task single-handed. Her value and her equipment may be unquestioned, but her task in its very nature calls for complementary service.

If the demand made of the newly enlisted is to accept discipline, then he is called on to realize that charitable or social service is intended to be not an emotional experience, a way of release from ennui, or a short cut to personal independence, but rather a stern undertaking. It is no small thing, lightly to be undertaken, to attempt whether through legislative effort or case treatment to interfere with the way in which a fellow human being is living his or her life.

ON the other hand, those who have suffered an initiation are, as it were, on probation. They are being proved to determine whether theirs is the faith that makes for increase in the number of the enlisted. The task of enlisting seemed comparatively simple in the days when the social tasks were few in number and variety, and when we of the charity organization movement felt that our call for service had in the main to be for a very definite form of effort. We feel, perhaps more acutely as the years go on, that bringing men and women and their sons and daughters to a sense of the importance of social-mindedness is a very delicate and a very difficult task. But we have not lost, I trust, faith in people, faith in the power on the one hand of the distressed to respond to human kindness, on the other of the right-minded to steady the lives of the distressed. The intrinsic value of the friendly visitor is recorded in many of the case records of our societies; the

simple annals of achievement need not be given here.

But it is not sufficient to call for volunteers to serve as friendly visitors. The volunteer tasks must be varied, and the volunteer must be made to feel that if the contribution he is prepared to make is to sit in a district office patiently to answer the telephone, to address envelopes, to write letters of inquiry, or to make synopses of case records; or outside the office to make inquiries at a hospital or school, or to take a patient to a clinic or for an outing—he must be made to feel that, in doing all of these things, he is adding in a definite way to the sum of usefulness of the district. Whenever a volunteer, by carrying district details, releases the trained worker, whether volunteer or member of the regular staff, from the routine task to perfect her relationship with families under care, he is actually, even though indirectly, ministering to the needs of the distressed. To some professional social workers it has seemed that a commuting by check would fulfil

the obligation of the unprepared man or woman who feels the call to serve. In no such sense is the suggestion made that the simple office task take the place of an effort towards direct relationship, but rather that the simple task may lead by a long road to the goal. To read the record with the intent of finding its meaning, to answer the telephone with a sense of the part courtesy plays in establishing a right basis for co-operation, to keep office with a wish to learn how aptly to play the office game, to visit the clinic determined to learn what the hospital relation is to the patient, means gradually to get an insight into the relation of routine and of small tasks to a consistent whole. It means, in other words, to be serving an apprenticeship.

I was talking the other day with a society girl who had, through a simple clerical task, made her first contact with a district office. This task led to the tutoring of a boy, in whom she became so constructively interested that she has helped him, a handicapped boy, wisely

to determine not only his own future life, but that of his brother. After discussing the present situation of these two boys and the development of a little girl whom she had, herself under instruction of a specialist, corrected of a speech defect, and after speaking of the efforts she was making to bring other young women into district work, she turned and said, "What have you for *me* to do?" Was it not the question of the loyal disciple of a cause? A young college graduate, who also got her initiation at a district office through a clerical task, spoke a few days ago of how she had urged a college friend to come with her to the district office, saying that she planned in the spring to go back to her college to tell other girls of the opening through district work.

The life of societies such as ours lies in our adaptability. We cannot be educating our own or any other group unless we can meet the necessary test. We must make as careful study of the potential power of the possible recruit as of the families we treat. The failure

to make good in charity organization service is not a failure of one party alone to the effort, but of the two parties, the society that tries to enlist, and the person that is perhaps timidly, shrinkingly ready to be enlisted. Those on probation are not the members of the regular district staff alone, but the whole force of enlisted persons, which includes all the regular volunteers who have had the benefit of a connection with the society.

THE LARGER ISSUES

IN our district work we are always running the risk of letting the daily burden make us careless of the larger issues. Sometimes the simple story of a broken life may reveal the great gulf that lies between those who do and those who do not suffer devastation. Padraic Colum, the Irish poet, in "An Old Woman of the Roads," hauntingly puts our task:

> O, to have a little house!
> To own the hearth and stool and all!
> The heaped up sods upon the fire,
> The pile of turf again' the wall!

To have a clock with weights and chains,
And pendulum swinging up and down!
A dresser filled with shining delph,
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,
And fixing on their shelf again
My white and blue and speckled store!

I could be quiet there at night
Beside the fire and by myself,
Sure of a bed, and loth to leave
The ticking clock and shining delph!

Och! but I'm weary of mist and dark,
And roads where there's never a house or bush,
And tired I am of bog and road,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

And I am praying to God on high,
And I am praying Him night and day,
For a little house—a house of my own—
Out of the wind's and rain's way.

Do not the lines show what we have to do? There are the haunting hosts of men and women, of boys and girls, and of little children, who are failing to

make or have made for them a home. They are those who are losing the ideal and those who start life with no traditional background of the hearthstone. If our adventure be in any deep sense a quest for right relationship, we must be haunted by the image of the lost hearthstones. Along with the persistent work of securing and initiating volunteers to aid in family rehabilitation we must carry, through combination of forces, our casework experiences over into the field of larger efforts in behalf of family life.

"Who will bring the red fire
Unto a new hearth?
Who will lay the wide stone
On the waste of the earth?"

to quote from another poem of Padraic Colum, "The Fire Bringer." Are we of the charity organization societies prepared, after our more than three decades of service, to say, we do bring fire to the stone?

In conclusion let me say that we must not measure our volunteer work by any rule of numbers; our measuring must be

taken by the quality of our service, and the touchstone is loyalty. If our measure be so taken, and we can show a picked band of single-minded, alert, persistent persons, we can continue to make a definite and essential contribution to the big task of sound readjustment of social conditions.

In the final analysis the quest for right human relationship is the quest for divine relationship. In thinking of that ultimate goal, we can hold in remembrance a picked group of the loyal in our societies who have found the way to that great ultimate relationship.

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